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The Truth about Jesus' Parents: Part 1- Mary, "How Can this Be?"

By Tal Davis

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged (betrothed) to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." 34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin (Lit know no man)?" 35 The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. 36 And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:26-38 NASB)

As I write this article, we are now well into the 2014 Christmas season. Two weeks ago, on the day before Thanksgiving, my wife and I set up our tree and decorated the house with lights, stockings, and ribbons. Yes, it's Christmas time alright,

with trees, decorations, parties, lights, egg nog, mistletoe, and so on.

We also hear old familiar songs on the radio performed by long-ago passed-away singers like Elvis Presley, Karen Carpenter, Bing Crosby, or Gene Autry. Some of you younger readers are asking, "Who were they?" You certainly know who Elvis was and likely have heard of the Carpenters. But what of Bing (what kind of name is that?) Crosby? Well, he recorded "White Christmas," still the number one best-selling single Christmas song of all time. It has sold more than 50 million copies since it was first released in 1942 and is still growing. Incidentally, Bing's version of "Silent Night" is number three all time.

And who was Gene Autry? He was one of the two greatest singing cowboys (the other was Roy Rogers) who originally recorded "Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer" (the number two all-time best-seller).

Likewise, each year we faithfully endure endless TV specials and old classic movies like "It's A Wonderful Life," "White Christmas" (the movie title was taken from the song), "Miracle on 34th Street," etc. My favorite is "A Christmas Story." It's the one about little Ralphie who desperately wanted a Red Rider BB Gun for Christmas ("You'll shoot your eye out, kid!").

But wait, isn't something missing? Are we forgetting something? Oh yeah... something about the birth of Jesus. That is important, isn't it? As Linus so audaciously stated, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown!"

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So, let's focus on the true meaning of the holiday. In this installment we begin a two part series on the parents of Jesus. That is, we will examine what the Bible really says about Mary and Joseph. We will look at who they were and what part they played in the Christmas event. In the light of Scripture, we will also analyze some of the mistaken ideas some groups have formed about them. In this installment we look at Mary the mother of Jesus, and next time at Joseph his earthly father. As we look at these two central figures, we will get a clearer picture of who Jesus was and what His birth means for us.

First, we begin with Mary. Unfortunately, some have distorted her theological prominence and the part she had in the Nativity process. For instance, over the centuries, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) elevated her status in their faith far beyond what the Bible reveals. To begin with, the RCC teaches as church dogma that Mary was conceived without sin and therefore had no original sin. This is called the doctrine of the "Immaculate Conception." Many non-Catholics erroneously assume that the term refers to Jesus' conception, but it actually refers to Mary. The RCC also asserts that she was, at the moment of her death, or even before that point, taken immediately and bodily into heaven to be Co-Mediatrix (mediator between man and God) with Jesus. They call this the doctrine of the "Assumption" (from Latin *assumptio*, meaning "a taking").

As evangelicals, of course we honor and are grateful for the life and faith of Mary. She is a wonderful example of someone who was willing to give all for God. But in neither of the above cases are those RCC doctrines found in Scripture. They were added to Catholic dogma by

tradition and the supposedly infallible "ex Cathedra" declarations of Popes. However, as biblical Christians we must stick only to what the Bible says for our essential doctrinal tenets. There is no Scriptural evidence Mary was without sin or that she did not die in the usual way.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS/ Mormons) goes much further astray in its doctrines about Mary. The LDS teaches that Mary was literally impregnated by God the Heavenly Father, an exalted physical man of flesh and bone. The implication is that somehow he deposited his physical seed in her womb to fertilize the embryo that was Jesus. Thus, they maintain that Jesus was Heavenly Father's "only begotten son in the flesh."

In no way does that correspond with the New Testament's accounts about Jesus' human origin. They state that Mary was miraculously conceived of the Holy Spirit with no indication of any physical biological processes (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35). (For more information on the LDS' view of God and Jesus go to *Mormonism Versus Christianity - Can They Both Be Christian? Part 1*)

These are some of the errors we come across surrounding Mary. But now let's ascertain several significant true facts about her solely from Scripture.

Luke tells us in his Gospel (see above) how the angel Gabriel came to Mary in Nazareth (he may have gotten this story directly from Mary herself). At that time, Mary was "betrothed" (engaged) to Joseph to be married. It is important to understand that according to the Jewish tradition of that time, a woman would live with her "husband to be" for about one year before the marriage was solemnified and consummated. So during that period, Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her God had favored her. She was shocked to

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learn that she would carry a child and his name would be "Jesus." The name "Jesus" is the anglicized derivative of the Greek *Iésous*, a derivation of the Hebrew *Yeshua*. The same name is anglicized in the Old Testament as *Joshua*. It literally means "the Lord is Salvation."

One of the most controversial and scorned doctrines of the historic Christian faith is the Virgin Birth of Jesus. Actually, it might better be called the Virgin Conception (not to be confused with the RCC's Immaculate Conception of Mary - see above). It was, after all, Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb that was truly miraculous event, not His delivery in Bethlehem (which did fulfill prophecy - see Micah 5:2).

Strangely enough, the first person to express doubt about the doctrine was Mary herself. When Gabriel made the announcement to her she was bewildered and asked, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Gabriel, however, assured her that "All things are possible with God." (Luke 1:34, 37)

In Luke 2:1-20 we find the familiar account of the birth of Jesus. We all know the story of Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem where she gave birth to her son. The key point is that Mary was willing to do whatever God asked no matter what the cost. She was not afraid to face possible humiliation or rejection by Joseph and her family.

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We know that from then on Mary was a loving wife to Joseph and a caring mother for Jesus (and her other children). She stayed involved in Jesus' life until his death. She and Joseph took Him to be dedicated (Luke 2:8-33). She was present when He performed His first miracle at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). She was at the foot of the cross when Jesus told John to take care of her (John 19:25-27). She was also in the upper room after His resurrection with the disciples (Acts 1:14).

Clearly, God chose the right woman as the earthly mother of our Lord. We should praise Mary and be grateful for her life, but we must be careful not to go beyond what the Bible teaches about her. We must remember that Mary, just like all of us, was dependent on Jesus for her salvation. Even at His birth, Mary knew Jesus was critical for her eternal life. He is also crucial for our salvation. Thus, in the midst of all the Christmas clutter, that should be the most important thing!

In the next installment we will look at the events of Jesus' birth from the point of view of His earthly father, Joseph.